September 9, 2002

To: NITC Commissioners

From: Anne Byers

Subject: Community Council Report

IT Planning and Mini Grant Program. In partnership with Technologies Across Nebraska, the Community Council will be working with eight communities to develop local information technology plans.   The eight communities selected to participate in the program are Alliance; Brown/Keya Paha/Rock Counties; Crawford-Harrison; Custer County; Edgar; Fillmore County; West Point; and York County.   The participating communities will also serve as pilots for the Community Information Technology Toolkit.   The toolkit includes the newly developed *Information Technology Assessment and Planning Workbook*.   The workbook is available at http://www.nitc.state.ne.us/toolkit/workbook/ .   The workbook is the most complete resource on local information technology planning available.   Information on the workbook and the IT planning pilot project will be presented at the Nebraska Rural Institute in Gering on September 17 and at the Rural Telecon Conference in Des Moines on October 8.

RUS Community Connect Broadband Grant Workshop. The Nebraska Information Technology Commission is co-sponsoring a workshop on preparing USDA Rural Utilities Service Community Connect Broadband Grant applications. The grant program provides funding for small, economically challenged communities to provide broadband access.   The workshop will be broadcast to satellite downlink sites on Sept. 24 from 2:30 to 4:00 P.M. CT. Information on the workshop is available at http://www.nitc.state.ne.us/RUSworkshop .

Inventory and Gap Analysis Update. One of the Community Council's action items includes working with Technologies Across Nebraska to complete an inventory of IT-related programs and to conduct a gap analysis. At the September 6 Community Council meeting, members reviewed the inventory of resources submitted by Technologies Across Nebraska partners and an inventory done by Congressman Tom Osborne as part of this Rural Economic Development Handbook and Resource Guide.   Members concurred that together the two inventories accurately reflected available resources for communities. In a preliminary gap analysis, members identified the following needs:

- There is a lack of motivated local leadership in many communities.
- There are few effective regulatory remedies for poor Internet service.
- There is a need for technical assistance in evaluating broadband technologies.
- Additional information on providing incentives for alternative service providers is needed.
- Information on new models of private-public partnerships need to be developed including sample cooperative agreements needs to be available.

Additional information will be gathered from Technologies Across Nebraska members and the communities participating in the IT planning pilot program.

Telehealth Update.   The Nebraska Public Service Commission recently released an order asking for more information on providing up to $750,000 in support from the Nebraska Universal Service Fund for health care. Written comments must be filed by September 25 and a hearing will be held on October 8.   Several members of the Telehealth Subcommittee are planning to testify.